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THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

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It was a happy thought that prompted Professor Cobern to write a book on the new archaeological discoveries.[1] He is concerned with those archaeological remains from the eastern Mediterranean world which shed light upon the history of Christianity during the early centuries of its existence. For the most part these discoveries are not "new" in the sense that they are now disclosed for the first time. Some of the data used were discovered a half-century or more ago, while others of more recent date were already well known to specialists. But the author has rendered a distinct and most praiseworthy service by bringing together in popular form for the use of the general reader a wealth of interesting information that was formerly available only in technical periodicals or in massive volumes that could be used to advantage only by experts. Not least attractive is the writer's enthusiasm, by which he makes the dead past live again as he depicts the experiences of the ancients who once moved among these relics of antiquity. A crumpled bit of papyrus, a fragment of parchment, a piece of broken pottery, or a few words scrawled upon a crumbling wall are for Professor Cobern living voices whose message he delights to pass on to the present.

The book is comprehensive in its scope. It begins with a description of those excavations which resulted in the recovery of numerous papyri that had lain buried for centuries beneath the sands in the rubbish heaps of Egypt. The way in which these ancient documents have been brought to light from time to time forms a fascinating story. These finds include private correspondence, reports of local officials, and other brief records from the life of the common people written in the Greek as actually spoken by the populace of Egypt about the beginning of the Christian Era.

Presumably the Greek speech of Egypt at this time was practically the same as that used in other parts of the eastern Mediterranean. Hence these examples of the everyday speech have unique value as shedding light upon the contemporary writings of the early Christians preserved for us in the New Testament. A brief summary is given of the value of the papyri for the student of the text, grammar, style, and vocabulary of the New Testament.

The third section of the book deals with "Ancient New Testaments Recently Discovered." The oldest Greek manuscripts of the Bible, beginning with the recovery of *Codex Sinaiticus* by Tischendorf in 1859, are described. Then follows an account of parchment, vellum, and papyrus fragments of portions of the New Testament. Mention is also made of recently discovered translations of the New Testament into Syriac, Coptic, Latin, and other less widely used tongues.

[1] *The New Archaeological Discoveries and Their Bearing upon the New Testament and upon the Life and Times of the Primitive Church.* By Camden M. Cobern. Introduction by Edouard Naville. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1917. Pp. xxxiv+698. $3.00.

Early Christian documents not included in the New Testament are treated in a separate section. Here we read about the recently discovered "Sayings" of Jesus, the fragmentary Gospel and Apocalypse of Peter, and other uncanonical gospels and acts. Considerable portions of these documents are reproduced, thus giving the reader a good idea of their contents. Large quotations are also made from the *Apology* of Aristides; the *Didache* is almost completely reproduced; examples of ancient prayers, amulets, and hymns are given at length; private and official Christian letters are cited; and other documents of a miscellaneous character are described and quoted.

Part II deals mainly with the monuments and inscriptions recovered through excavations at various burial places and ancient cities about the Mediterranean. From Palestine we are carried to Pompeii, and thence to the catacombs at Rome. The cemeteries in Egypt, gravestones in Phrygia, monuments in Dalmatia, and Christian remains still standing in the deserts of Syria are rapidly surveyed.

A special section is devoted to cities mentioned in the New Testament, a full hundred pages being given to an account of the discoveries made at thirty or more localities in Greece, Italy, Asia Minor, Syria, and the islands of the eastern Mediterranean. The reader is brought into the presence of many objects familiar to Paul and his fellow-laborers as they preached the new religion in the chief centers of life in that ancient world.

The final section, on "New Documentary and Other Evidence Throwing Light upon the Early Christian Centuries," is somewhat miscellaneous and seems to be in the nature of an afterthought. It treats of Palestine as a setting for the work of Jesus, and then proceeds to discuss "some literary habits of the first century illustrated in the papyri." This is followed by a very brief account of new light upon the early Christian's gentile environment from classical sources. The most important discoveries and sources of information for Judaism are briefly recounted. Then the author reverts once more to the papyri, closing with a chapter on "Intellectual, Social, and Religious Life of the First and Adjoining Centuries as Seen in the Papyri," etc. A brief "recapitulation" assembles some additional illustrative items on a few topics previously discussed.

The attractiveness of the book is much enhanced by numerous illustrations of a widely varied character which bring before the reader some of the more interesting objects that have been unearthed by excavators.

A brief introduction by Professor Edouard Naville, of Geneva, adds nothing to the merit of the volume. On the contrary, it calls undue attention to an apologetic interest which occasionally emerges, but not in a very obtrusive way, throughout the body of the book. Archaeology, like Scripture, can be easily cited in favor of widely varying types of theological opinion. The archaeological remains of antiquity are just as much subject to *interpretation* as are the literary remains—a fact which Professor Naville seems to ignore when he affirms that the new discoveries have brought about a radical change in the methods and ruling principles of historical research.

Professor Cobern's work should serve well the purposes of an introduction for those who are entering upon this study for the first time, and it is a welcome handbook bringing together in reliable and attractive fashion the main outlines of the subject for those already acquainted with the field as a whole or in part.